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The Nordic Council – our council

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Nordic co-operation

Nordic co-operation is one of the world's most extensive forms of regional collaboration, involving Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Åland.

Nordic co-operation has firm traditions in politics, the economy, and culture. It plays an important role in European and international collaboration, and aims at creating a strong Nordic community in a strong Europe.

Nordic co-operation seeks to safeguard Nordic and regional interests and principles in the global community. Common Nordic values help the region solidify its position as one of the world's most innovative and competitive.

Nordic Council

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This brochure will provide you with a deeper insight into what the Nordic Council is all about. You will discover that the work of the Council exerts an influence on your life. Perhaps you would like to help exert influence on the Council.

The Nordic Council – our council

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A full-page background image featuring a silhouette of a person wearing a winter hat and jacket, standing on a dark, rocky outcrop. The person is looking out over a body of water towards a sunset. The sky is a gradient of deep blue at the top to bright orange near the horizon, with scattered clouds. The water reflects the colors of the sky. A semi-transparent white circular shape is positioned behind the text on the left side of the image.

**It is also important that the
people of the Region continue
to consider the Council relevant
to their lives.**

Introduction

The Nordic Council has existed for more than six decades. Much has changed in that time – compare 21st-century standards of living with those of 1952, consider modern technological advances, and think about how easily we move back and forth across borders, not just in the Nordic Region but globally.

Throughout its history, the Council has been underpinned by the strong cultural, social and democratic values of the member countries, and it is these same commonly held values that will carry the Council forward into the future. However, it is also important that the people of the Region continue to consider the Council relevant to their lives. The Nordic Council is our council, an arena in which our elected representatives work together to promote closer partnership and make the

Nordic voice stronger in an international context.

The path to appreciation of the Nordic Council as our council is through understanding. And understanding comes from knowledge. Knowledge of the Council's history, of its composition, and, above all, of the work that it does every single day – not just in the Nordic countries but in the wider world too. The Council can and does make a difference to the lives of people in the Region – and hopefully beyond.

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A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'J-Erik Enestam'.

Jan-Erik Enestam
Director
The Nordic Council

Out of the ashes ...

The history of the Nordic Council has its origins in the end of the Second World War. From north to south and east to west, Europe lay in ruins. Civilians were fleeing, death camps were being discovered and unbelievable human tragedies were only just coming to light. In Japan, two atomic bombs had caused unprecedented destruction. The old world had collapsed. Soon, reconstruction efforts were underway.

In 1945, a vital new political forum – the United Nations – emerged to serve as an arena for international dialogue and partnership.

Here, in the Nordic Region, we shared a sense that our modest size could be a disadvantage in an uncertain world. Our larger neighbours, like Germany, had been bombed to pieces, and the Soviet Union was behaving somewhat erratically. It felt as if anything could happen.

By the end of the 1940s, the sense of instability and insecurity was overwhelming, and the Nordic countries felt they could make greater use of their linguistic and cultural affinity. The countries' social systems may not have been identical, but the similarities outweighed the differences. The concept of Nordic co-operation therefore arose from a desire to give the Region a stronger, more unified voice at a time when the political future was entirely unpredictable. Popular support for the setting up of the Nordic Council was widespread, driven largely by the Nordic Association.

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The first steps

The first step towards Nordic co-operation was taken by the Danish Prime Minister Hans Hedtoft (Social Democrat). On 13 August 1951, he proposed the creation of a body where parliamentarians could meet and talk – both with each other and with the Nordic governments.

In 1952, Hedtoft's proposal was adopted by Denmark, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. The Nordic Council was a reality – the first Session was held in the Danish parliament on 13 February 1953. Hans Hedtoft was elected the first President of the Council.

First Session of the Nordic Council, 13 February 1953

Helsinki Treaty, 23 March 1962

The Nordic Council is established, 1952

1951 • 1952 • 1953 • 1954 • 1955 • 1956 • 1957 • 1958 • 1959 • 1960 • 1961 • 1962 • 1963 • 1964 • 1965 • 1966 • 1967 • 1968 • 1969 • 1970 • 1971 • 1972 • 1973 • 1974 • 1975 • 1976 • 1977 • 1978 • 1979 • 1980 • 1981 • 1982 • 1983 • 1984 • 1985 • 1986 • 1987 • 1988 • 1989 • 1990 • 1991 • 1992 • 1993 • 1994 • 1995 • 1996 • 1997 • 1998 • 1999 • 2000 • 2001 • 2002 • 2003 • 2004 • 2005 • 2006 • 2007 • 2008 • 2009 • 2010 • 2011 • 2012 • 2013 • 2014 • 2015 • 2016 • 2017 • 2018 • 2019 • 2020 • 2021 • 2022 • 2023 • 2024 • 2025

Proposal to set up a Nordic Council, 13 August 1951

Joint Nordic labour market, July 2, 1954

Finland joins, 1955

Passport agreement becomes Passport Union, 1958

Nordic Council Literature Prize awarded for first time, 1962

Nordic Council Music Prize initiated, 1965

Passport agreement is introduced, 1952

Nordic Convention on Social Security, 1955

Finland signs up

Finland joined the Council in 1955. At the opening of the fourth Session in Copenhagen in 1956, the Swedish President of the Council, Bertil Ohlin (People's Party) said: "Without Finland it felt as if a chair was empty [...] Only now is the Nordic circle complete."

Full steam ahead

In the 1950s, the Council passed a whole series of measures that made life easier for ordinary citizens. The Passport Union made it easier for people to travel within the Region, and served as an early model for the Schengen Agreement.

Denmark joins
the EEC, 1973

1966 • 1967 • 1968 • 1969 • 1970 • 1971 • 1972 • 1973 • 1974 • 1975 • 1976 • 1977 • 1978 • 1979 • 1980 • 1981

Åland and the Faroe
Islands become
members, 1970

Comprehensive cultural
agreement, 1971

Simultaneous
interpretation into
Finnish is introduced,
1977

Nordic Council of
Ministers sees the
light of day, 1971

The Helsinki Treaty

As the Nordic countries worked more and more closely together, they also increasingly turned their attention to the rest of Europe. Membership of EFTA and applications to join the EEC accelerated the process of drawing up a treaty for Nordic co-operation.

The Helsinki Treaty, which functions as a kind of Nordic constitution, was adopted in Helsinki in 1962. Among other things, it empowered the Council to speak on issues of significance for Nordic co-operation.

Co-operation on a wider range of issues

Several years would pass before Åland, the Faroe Islands and Greenland became members of the Nordic Council. In 1970, it was resolved that the Faroe Islands should be allowed to participate as part of the Danish delegation and Åland as part of the Finnish delegation. In 1984, Greenland was also granted a place on the Danish delegation.

The signing of the Åland Document by the ministers for Nordic co-operation in Mariehamn, Åland, in 2007 gave the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland a greater say in Nordic co-operation.

Greenland becomes a member, 1984

Fall of the Berlin Wall, 1989

The Saami parliaments in Finland, Norway and Sweden gain observer status on the Nordic Council, 1994

The Nature and Environment Prize is set up, 1995

1982 · 1983 · 1984 · 1985 · 1986 · 1987 · 1988 · 1989 · 1990 · 1991 · 1992 · 1993 · 1994 · 1995 · 1996 · 1997 · 1998 · 1999 · 2000 · 2001 · 2002 · 2003 · 2004 · 2005 · 2006 · 2007 · 2008 · 2009 · 2010 · 2011 · 2012 · 2013 · 2014 · 2015 · 2016 · 2017 · 2018 · 2019 · 2020 · 2021 · 2022 · 2023 · 2024

Action plan for economic development and full employment, 1985

The Baltic Assembly is formed, based on the Nordic Council model, 1991

Norway and Iceland join the EEA, 1994

Sweden and Finland join the EU, 1995

Culture

The desire for faster, smoother and less bureaucratic co-operation led in 1971 to the signing of a comprehensive agreement on cultural co-operation. The aim was to enhance the impact of the different countries' investments in education, research and other cultural activities.

Nordic Council Prizes

The Nordic Council awards annual prizes for music, for film and for nature and the environment. The purpose is to boost interest in Nordic literature, language, music and film. Each prize is worth DKK 350,000.

European co-operation

In 1973, Denmark joined a body that many feared would sound the death knell for the Nordic Council – the EEC. However, instead of withering away, the establishment of the inter-governmental Nordic Council of Ministers in 1971 actually reinvigorated co-operation.

Norway and Iceland joined the EEA in 1994, and accepted the same rules for freedom of movement in the internal European market as the Nordic EU countries.

End of the wall, start of new era

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 was hugely significant in terms of strengthening and extending Nordic co-operation to encompass the Baltic states and North-West Russia.

Inaugural Nordic Council Film Prize, 2002

Formalisation of co-operation with Russian parliamentarians, 2010

1973 • 1998 • 1999 • 2000 • 2001 • 2002 • 2003 • 2004 • 2005 • 2006 • 2007 • 2008 • 2009 • 2010 • 2011 • 2012

Nordic Youth Council becomes an independent body, 2002

Åland Document is signed, 5 September 2007

The Nordic Council also maintains regular contact with other European inter-parliamentary bodies. International co-operation and networking never stand still.

The purpose of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC) is to strengthen the Baltic Sea Region as a whole.

In 2007, the Nordic Council established contact with both the Belarusian government and the opposition, a move that led to round-table talks, etc.

What issues does the Nordic Council address?

In essence, the work of the Nordic Council is quite simple. This is because its members are motivated by a single desire: to make the Region a good place to live. This is the primary objective behind all of the Council's ideas and proposals.

However, the path towards a better Region is not always a straight one. Challenging twists and turns litter the way, and many different interests have to be taken into account. The Nordic Council is essentially closer to the ordinary citizen than the Council of Ministers. It is easier for Council members to work across national boundaries than it is for governments, so they are in a better position to promote issues they hold particularly dear.

One of the most fundamental challenges faced by the Nordic Council is the maintenance and further development of the **Nordic welfare system**. In the 20th century, it was taken for granted that the Nordic

welfare system would continue to improve, but the model now finds itself under financial pressure.

Cultural issues are also central to the work of the Council. This is due to the fact that the Nordic countries resemble each other so closely. Our languages, mentalities, values and general cultural affinity are, by and large, unifying rather than dividing factors. This is why cultural issues remain at the heart of the Nordic Council's work.

The mobility of the Region's citizens is another important issue. The freedom to travel from one country to another is not something that just happened automatically. It was the result of a conscious political decision.

When we look beyond the Region, it is important to remember that, even though our primary goal is to ensure a good life for the Nordic people, we cannot achieve that goal simply by thinking and acting in our own part of the world. For this reason, the Council not only works for a **sustainable Nordic Region**, but also contributes to a greener Europe

by working for a more sustainable international economy and an end to climate change.

Values such as **human rights, democracy, equality and the rule of law** are central to the Council's international work.

Co-operation on foreign and security policy is also high on the agenda. The Nordic Region is seriously affected by events elsewhere in Europe and the world. EU policies and global concerns must therefore form part of the Council's agenda. The Council consistently strives to give the Nordic countries a stronger voice on EU issues, e.g. on the revision of the Consumer Rights Directive, the drafting of the Baltic Sea Strategy and the EU fisheries policy. Establishing and maintaining contact with the rest of the world is therefore a priority. It is only through interaction with the outside world that the Council is able to exert influence on international policies and achieve the best possible outcomes for the people of the Region.

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Closer to the people

The Nordic Council constantly strives to improve its contact with the people of the Region. In order to enhance openness and dialogue, a new right of open access was introduced on 1 January 2012. Every Nordic citizen is now entitled to request a meeting with a committee of the Council and put forward his or her opinion. This further reinforces the fact that the Nordic Council is your council and my council – it is our council.

The Presidium and committees

The Council has a Presidium and five committees.

The Presidium

The Presidium provides political leadership. It is the Council's highest decision-making body between sessions. The Presidium has overall responsibility for political issues, planning and budgets as well as parliamentary co-operation on foreign and security policy. The President and Vice-president of the Council sit on the Presidium.

Culture and Education Committee

Culture:

- New technology and media platforms
- Language co-operation
- Innovation in cultural policy, including research and analysis

Education:

- The student retention issue
- Youth unemployment
- Lifelong learning
- Innovation in education

Citizens' and Consumer Rights Committee:

- Democracy
- Human rights
- Civil rights
- Equality
- Consumer issues
- Food safety
- Combating crime, including international crime and terrorism
- Justice policy
- Immigration and refugees
- Co-operation on anti-racism
- Rights of indigenous peoples

Environment and Natural Resources Committee:

- Climate change
- Nuclear safety
- Fisheries management
- Food production and food safety
- Protection of biological diversity
- Environmental protection in the Arctic
- Hazardous chemicals
- Energy and transport (along with the Business and Industry Committee)

Business and Industry Committee:

- Internal market, freedom of movement, trade
- Regions and structural support
- Employment and the labour market
- Working environment
- Infrastructure and transport
- Communication
- IT
- Research
- Energy (along with the Environment Committee)

Welfare Committee

- Welfare and social security
- Social and health issues
- Disabilities
- Housing
- Families
- Children and young people
- Narcotics, alcohol and other substance abuse

Control Committee

The Control Committee exercises parliamentary control over activities financed by Nordic budgets.

Election Committee

The Election Committee organises elections called by the Session.

Party groups

Elected members of the Nordic Council have been entitled to form party groups since 1973. A party group must comprise at least four members and include representatives from at least two countries. These rules mean that some members of the Council may not belong to a registered party group. The Presidium determines the rules for the registration of party groups.

Five party groups are represented:

- The Social Democrat Group
- The Centre Group
- The Conservative Group
- The Left-wing Socialist Green Group
- Nordic Freedom

**The Nordic Council has
existed for more than
six decades.**

FACTS

The Nordic Council

- The Nordic Council, established in 1952, is the official body for Nordic inter-parliamentary co-operation.
- The Council is one of the three pillars of Nordic co-operation. The other two are popular, grassroots partnerships and inter-governmental co-operation.
- The Nordic Council advises and proposes initiatives to the governments of the Nordic countries and to the Council of Ministers.
- The Nordic Council has 87 members from Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland. Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden have 20 members each. Two of the Danish members are from the Faroe Islands and two of the Finnish members come from Åland. Iceland has seven members on the Nordic Council.
- Members are nominated by party groups and appointed by the national parliaments.
- The day-to-day political work is done by the Presidium and the five committees.
- Members of the Council are able to influence co-operation via, for example, member and committee proposals, recommendations, written presentations, statements and written and oral questions to the Nordic governments and to the Council of Ministers. The practice of referring questions to national governments is unique.
- The Nordic Council holds two annual sessions and the committees meet five times a year.
- The Presidency rotates among member countries on an annual basis.

FACTS

The Council sessions

- During the Session, members discuss policies with government ministers from the five Nordic nations, the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland. It is a unique form of international co-operation.
- During the Session, members decide which proposals should be forwarded to the governments. This is done during both the theme Session in March and the autumn Session.
- During sessions, Council members are able to put questions directly to Nordic ministers.
- The autumn Session is hosted by the country that holds the Presidency.
- The autumn Session also elects the President, Vice-President and members of the Presidium and committees for the following year.

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